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ABSTRACT

This book presents 30 brief practical teaching ideas for writing and English instruction in secondary classrooms. The first chapter presents various strategies for helping students learn to write well: students compile their own examples of effective writing; they turn interviews into gift books; they record their own activities for a whole day to help them develop an eye for detail; and they practice supportive peer-feedback techniques. Other activities in the first chapter focus on close observation, word play, and poetry writing. The second chapter presents activities intended to foster appreciation and understanding of literary works--among the elements of these strategies are a dialectical journal; a list of questions to help students analyze characters; guest poets; a discussion of banned books; an examination of conflict between friends; and an in-depth poetry project for seniors. Freeze frames, a reading quilt, and riddles that require research are a few of the activities in the third chapter entitled "Explorations." Other activities in the chapter vary in focus, but they have several things in common: they inspire teachers; they motivate students; and they offer opportunities for genuine learning in the classroom. (RS)

Ideas Plus: Practical Classroom Ideas by Teachers for Teachers: Book 17.

IDEAS Plus

PRACTICAL CLASSROOM IDEAS BY TEACHERS FOR TEACHERS

IDEAS Plus

A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas

Book Seventeen

National Council of Teachers of English
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Foreword

IDEAS Plus and its quarterly companion *Classroom NOTES Plus* are the principal benefits of NCTE Plus membership.

The ideas collected in this seventeenth edition of *IDEAS Plus* come from two sources: ideas submitted at an Idea Exchange session at an NCTE Annual Convention or Spring Conference, and contributions by readers of *Classroom NOTES Plus* and *IDEAS Plus*.

Some of the teaching practices described here are innovative and surprising; others are adaptations on familiar ideas. Your own ingenuity will doubtless come in handy as you customize these approaches for your students.

Feel free to send us a teaching practice of your own to share with NCTE Plus members. Submissions for consideration may be mailed to *IDEAS Plus/Classroom NOTES Plus,* 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096; or sent by e-mail to notesplus@ncte.org.

1 Prewriting and Writing

In this chapter are presented various strategies for helping students learn to write well. Students compile their own examples of effective writing in "Keeping a 'Good Writing' File"; they turn interviews into gift books in "Writing Children's Books for Real Children"; in "One Day in My Life," recording their own activities for a whole day gives students an eye for detail; and in "Tips for Respectful Responses," students practice supportive peer-feedback techniques. Other activities focus on close observation, word play, poetry writing, and more.

Keeping a "Good Writing" File

I have used this idea for the past three years with high school seniors. It gives students practice in critical reading and helps them appreciate and develop writing style. The following are instructions I give to students:

A "Good Writing" File

A "Good Writing" File is a compilation of sentences that you consider to be examples of effective writing. You will find these sentences in your day to day reading. Look around you; the world is full of effective writing. You can find this writing in textbooks, in novels, in newspapers, in magazines, in newsletters—anywhere writers are engaged in the act of expressing ideas clearly and effectively.

The first set of files will be due on Monday, _____ (date). Subsequent files will be due every Monday. Each week I will read and respond, briefly, to your entries. At the end of each month, I will give a letter grade evaluating all the work for that month. The writing files are a weekly writing assignment and as such they will make up a significant portion of your grade each quarter.

Purpose

The writing file is designed to give you practice in two areas that are crucial in developing and improving your own writing style. First, the file will give you practice in being a critical reader, a reader who reacts to a writer's style as well as to a writer's content. This will help you to develop your own writing style.

Writing is the art of producing desired effects in readers. Good writers know not only what effect they want to produce but how that effect can be achieved. Good readers understand not only what effect was produced but how it was produced. The more skillful you become as a reader the more skillful you may become as a writer.

Second, the good writing file will give you practice in analyzing and explaining prose. If you can break a piece of writing down into its disparate parts, analyze how it works, and explain how it works to a reader, you demonstrate true understanding of that piece of writing.

One final benefit of the "Good Writing" File: writing is an imitative act. The sentences that you select and analyze—sentences that you have identified as being effective in some way or ways—give you lots of models to imitate.

Format

Type each sentence that you find onto a piece of standard size typing paper. Include some sort of bibliographic information so that a reader might easily locate the original source. Keep all entries in a manila folder.

Underneath the typed entry, type your explanation as to why you feel that sentence is effective, focusing on style rather than content. Your explanation should be as full and as complete as possible, grammatically correct, and stylistically elegant. Explain what effect the writer is after and how the writer achieves that effect. Be as specific as possible.

Look words up in a dictionary before you discuss them to make sure they mean what you think they mean. Check out the etymology (origin) of the word. You never know what you might discover. Explain your assertions by discussing exactly which words you like and why you like them. Don't just say, "I like the word choice." What effects do these words produce? What makes these words more effective than other words that might have essentially the same meaning?

Example

"They make us, in whatever darkness, smile."
Brendan Gill. *Here at the New Yorker,* p. 199.

This is the last sentence in a long chapter about a cartoonist whom Gill admires. He wants to stress the warm humor in the cartoons. This warm humor is what Gill admires most of all. The cartoons do not make us guffaw; they make us smile and he wants to emphasize that word. He achieves this by moving the parenthetical expression into the middle of the sentence. This puts great stress on the word "smile," and that emphasizes the cartoons' effects on Gill. (Read it the other ways and you'll sense the difference.)

Robert H. Collins, Saint Cecilia Academy, Nashville, Tennessee

Writing Children's Books for Real Children

Preparation: Think about the books you loved as a child. What were some of your favorites? Which ones do you still remember? Which ones do you think you will want to share with your children? What did you like about them?

Brainstorm with students and discuss your ideas, looking for common themes, characteristics, and uniqueness. Create a web or map the important factors from a children's book. If time permits, read *your* favorite children's book aloud for your students.

Research, Library Skills, and Critical Thinking: Students may work in the library to select three children's books they like and answer questions about the books. In groups of three or four the students read, share, and discuss the books they chose and the characteristics of the books. Then, in whole class discussion, students predict how younger students (we work with a first-grade class) will react to the books.

Reading and Observing: Arrange to share a class period with a first-grade class. The older students will go to the first-grade class and read the three selected books to younger students. (Assign older to younger students with the help of the first-grade teacher.)

Students should first set the stage by getting to know the younger students. The students should talk to the younger students, ask what their favorite books are, ask if anyone reads to them, ask if they like to have people read to them (why or why not?), and find out if they are having fun learning to read.

Then students read the books to the younger students, observing the children's reactions to pictures, words, rhyme, and content. They talk with the students to find out which books the first graders preferred and why.

After returning to their classroom the older students can think about what happened during their reading and interviewing experience. They then write about how they felt about going to read to the first graders, the child's name, what happened during the reading, which books the child liked, what the child liked about the books, if their predictions about the child's reactions were correct, and based on their interview, what they believe is important in a children's book.

Next, students get in small groups to share reflections, what they learned, and conclusions they have drawn about the important characteristics of children's books.

Planning and Creating: The students brainstorm ideas for children's books. They will look to their own experience, to an interesting incident, or to an idea they would like to convey. The students individually complete a guided plan sheet for their book. The teacher explains the grading rubric that will be used for the books and shows an example of an already graded book.

Writing and Production: The students now implement their plans. They may need to have time in the computer lab or to use a computer at home to produce the text. Students will illustrate their own books, use computer art, or collaborate with another student on the illustrations (giving full credit to the artist). Students design the covers of their books and decide on the format (pop-up, flat, thick paper, cut out, etc.).

Provide examples of different types of books and different styles for numbering pages, binding, and so on. Students can also get ideas from looking at books in bookstores, in the library, and in catalogs. Students will also be able to share with each other what they are discovering about producing a book as they work in class. They may choose a fellow student to help them proof and revise their book before turning in a "mock-up" of their book to the teacher. The teacher may confer with the students to discuss grammar and usage, punctuation, coherence, placement of text, placement of art, use of color, numbering, title page requirements, cover, and make corrections or revisions as needed. The students then produce their final copy.

Putting Writing in Action: The students return to the first-grade class

(or meet in the library or other appropriate place) and pair up with their first-grade partners. The students read their books watching for listener's reactions and then they talk to the younger students about what they liked about the book.

Reflect and Write: After returning to the classroom, the students again write a reflection on the experience of sharing their own work with a young student.

Expand and Compare: Finally, students get in small groups to share and discuss the different experiences they had and what they learned.

Connie Ellard Bunch, Wilkinson County Christian Academy, Woodville, Mississippi

One Day in My Life

This activity gets my students to create details and perspective about a typical day in their life through writing and art. Students learn to organize, evaluate, interpret, and apply analytical writing and speaking techniques.

To do this my students take notes on every half-hour of their lives for a 24-hour period (except during sleep, although occasionally a student will try this . . .). These notes include going to class, eating, hanging out with friends, working, watching television, and so on.

After the 24-hour period ends students develop a narrative paper titled "One Day in My Life."

To accompany their narrative, students create a drawing or collage about that day. These are collected and given to other students, who write an interpretation based on the student's art. Each student should end up with their written assignment, their artwork, and an interpretation of another student's artwork. Students then share their narrative and artwork with the class. Students always have interesting observations to make about the assignment; the experience of examining how one spends one's time for a whole day can be a revealing and thought-provoking one.

For grading, I look at the level of detail and degree of creativity in both the writing and the art work; a meaningful interpretation of other students' artwork; the quality of their presentation; and participation in class discussion.

Kevin Brooke, Hot Springs County High School, Thermopolis, Wyoming

A Scavenger Hunt for Writing Poetry

I use this activity to get my students writing poetry on subjects they may not normally choose to write about. They tend to use more creative language when writing on a totally new topic.

Step One

I begin by giving students a list like the following. I ask them to find one or more of the following items (either after school or during a *quiet* class "field trip" through the school) and to list them in their writer's notebooks:

- the rationale for numbers found anywhere in the building
- three examples or variations of a color
- the price of one item of food in the building
- a printed message on the walls or bulletin boards
- a mirror and why you like it
- two textures that interest you
- one window that has a view
- a curious room
- four isolated words

Step Two

Then I give students a list of actual objects and ask them to find and bring back one or two of these to the classroom (again, either after school or on a group excursion through the school grounds).

- a pebble or stone
- a coin, bottlecap, or pop-tab
- a bit of rusty metal
- a blade of grass
- a *dead* twig
- an item that everyone sees every day but doesn't notice

Step Three

When we get back together in the classroom, whether the same day or at our next class meeeting, I ask students to look at their object and

their notes for inspiration, and to start writing a poem. It may be best just to get started writing, although there's bound to be some conversation. I ask students to think of creating a "moment" of writing—a poem, a paragraph, a sketch, a list, an advertisement, or whatever form strikes them as best. I encourage them to use the information they have collected and to focus on their thoughts and reactions to it.

Step Four

Read the writings aloud and enjoy.

Jane Krebs, Carlisle High School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Tips for Respectful Responses

These are some guidelines I give my students before they begin peer editing in class. I adapted this from *Process Writing: A Systematic Writing Strategy* by Stephen D. Gladis.

Using this method promotes relevant, useful responses and encourages students to be respectful in their responses.

The Coach Method

When reacting to another's writing, just remember the word *COACH*: commend, observe, ask, consider, help.

C—Commend: Always offer commendation (praise) first. It helps build rapport by relieving the writer's anxiety. If you make your initial remarks positive, the writer will breathe a sigh of relief, relax, and listen to what you have to say.

O—Observe: Try to remain an objective observer. Sometimes you, as the reader, may not like or be interested in the topic, but you can still try to discover something in the writing that you can link with your own life.

A—Ask: You can begin to probe the writer with questions. For instance, you might ask about a confusing sentence or a detail that doesn't seem to fit with the rest of the piece. Questions normally don't threaten writers because questions are not judgmental.

C—Consider: Always consider the writer's feelings and intentions. Take the softer approach—more considerate, more conservative, less radical—when critiquing someone's work.

H—Help: You must *earn the right* to help. Offer it in a considerate way. No critique, no matter how accurate or well intentioned, will be helpful and constructive if you have not first earned the trust of the writer.

Here are some examples of helpful feedback. Instead of a comment such as, "That was good," a more specific comment would be, "I really liked your word choice in the conclusion." Instead of "It was too short," better feedback would be, "It could have been improved if there had been more information about the accident or a description of the scene." Instead of saying, "This doesn't make any sense," you could say, "I need more details in this part to help me understand what's happening between the characters."

It's constructive to point out what words and/or details were really effective.You might also consider and discuss with the writer what you thought the best sentences were, and why.

A form like the following can help students practice using these peer editing guidelines with a particular piece of writing.

COACH

(Commend, Observe, Ask, Consider, Help)

Writer:_____ Date:_____

Topic:_____

C—Commend: Always offer praise first. Be specific in stating what you like.

"I like the way you clearly explained . . . "

"Your reasoning for recycling showed good, clear, sound logic, especially the part where you . . . "

_____

_____

_____

_____

O—Observe: Remain objective and open-minded. Try to discover something in the writing that you can link with your own life.

_____

_____

_____

A—Ask: Start asking the writer questions. When you come across a place that does not make sense, put a question mark there. You might ask:

"What did you mean when you wrote . . . ?"
"I don't quite understand . . . ?"
"Is there a reason you didn't include . . . ?"

_____

_____

_____

C—Consider: Always consider the writer's feelings and intentions. Be considerate when critiquing someone's work.

H—Help: Offer help in a considerate way.

"I think you could make your paper even stronger if you rewrote this part."
"I think your introduction was powerful but your conclusion needs a little more work to get your point across."

_____

_____

_____

Name of peer evaluator:

_____

Karin Harden, Cooke Middle School, Northville, Michigan

"No Repetition" Poetry Exercise

I use this exercise at the beginning of our poetry unit to get students to explore language and think about word usage. I obtained this idea at a workshop in Maryland and don't know who originated it. Step three and the examples are my own.

Step 1: Free Associate

Select a one-word topic, and tell the students to write as many free associations as they can within a given time limit (such as 20 seconds). Continue writing until the time is over. The teacher writes along with the students—on the board or a transparency.

Example: *snow*

slushy	horse-drawn
white	mittens
moonlight	woolen caps
hot chocolate	sliding
blanket	grey-black
head south	snow shovels
shining	frosty
tire tracks	ice
heavy coat	slick
sleighs	

Step 2: Shaping

From the list, write one descriptive sentence or paragraph. Do not repeat any word, including *a, an,* and *the*—this is where the frustration sets in! Words not on the list may be added.

Example: As moonbeams gleamed on frosty snowcapped grass, she poured steaming hot chocolate, watching sleighs slide over slick ground.

Step 3: Line Break Poem—No Repetition

Using the sentence or paragraph, rewrite the description into poetic form by breaking the lines. Try several different line breaks to see which best suits what you are saying.

Example 1:

As moonbeams
gleamed on
frosty
snowcapped
grass,
she poured
hot chocolate, watching
sleighs slide over
slick
ground.

Example 2:

As moonbeams gleamed
on frosty
snowcapped grass,

She poured hot
chocolate, watching

sleighs slide
over
slick ground.

Lizz Kolodny, Carver Center for Arts and Technology, Towson, Maryland

Writing about Risk

This is an exercise you can use to encourage students to write an organized and thoughtful extended essay—and to really enjoy it. This is what I ask students to do:

Extended Writing Topic

You will have the opportunity to write an extended response to the following topic. This should be a polished piece that has been revised and carefully written. Be sure to keep focused on the prompt, and have fun!

Taking risks is a part of life. Write a paper in which you tell of a time when someone took, or didn't take, a risk and how it affected that person's life.

You might, for example, do one of the following:

- Tell about a time when you, or someone else, pushed yourself into achieving a goal you didn't think you could accomplish.
- Explain a time when you, or someone else, chose not to take a risk and what the results were.
- Describe a risk you would like to take and how you think a successful outcome would make you or your life better.
- Explain the difference between a "safe" risk and an "unsafe" risk, using your own knowledge or experience.
- Write a fictional account of someone taking a risk.
- Take any of several other approaches to discussing this idea.

Assume that your audience is composed of readers like you, who have not read your other pieces of writing.

Students generally find this to be an interesting topic, which sparks good, lively writing and provocative follow-up discussion.

Bethanie George, Port Huron High School, Port Huron, Michigan

A Writing Treasure Trove

This excercise was adapted from an idea introduced at the 1996 West Tennessee Writing Project.

Many students have a hard time deciding what they can write about. This exercise gives them a beginning place by encouraging them to answer some questions about themselves. I ask students the following questions.

- What is your earliest memory? Who do you see in this memory that is really important to you? Why do you think they are? Describe what you can see around you. What are you feeling at this time?
- Who were your earliest friends? What did you enjoy doing with them? Freeze that thought as if you have taken a picture. What can you see? Where are you? What can you hear? How do you feel? Write anything you can remember.
- What do you remember about your first day at kindergarten? Where was the school? Who was your teacher? How did you feel when you

noticed that your parent had left? What did you especially enjoy about that day? What did you not like? Did you make a new friend?

- What do you remember about the first day of middle school?
- Do you remember a special birthday? Which one was it? Why was it so special? Take a picture. What do you see? Who is there? What are they doing? How do you feel? What can you hear, feel, etc.?
- Who is the person in your life that has meant the most to you? Think about this person and the reason he/she is so important. How has he/she helped you? Describe this person and the surroundings you generally see him/her in.
- What is your favorite holiday? Look back in your memories and see the favorite celebration. Who is there? What are people doing? Why is this so special to you?
- You are getting your driver's license today. How do you feel? What have you done to prepare for this day? What new responsibilities do you think you will have? What is the first thing you will do after you get your license? Where are you going? Who do you see in the passenger seat?
- Most people have a cause that they feel very strongly about. What is your cause? Explain your feelings. What evidence do you have that your stand is the right one? If you had to speak to the President and convince him that your side was right, what would you say?
- How do you feel about (name of school) this year? Are the rules fair? What can you do to make this a better school? What can teachers do to make your year better? What changes would you make at the school? Why?
- What is your favorite way to spend your leisure time? Where do you do this? With whom? What is your earliest memory of this? Why do you spend your time this way?
- What is your favorite book? Why? When did you read this? What is it about? Who is your favorite character in the book? Tell me about him/her. Would I like this book? Why? Who would you recommend this book to?
- What is your favorite style of music? When did you realize that you enjoyed this style? Who is the best musician or group of this style of music? What type of rhythm does it have? Who else in your group of friends likes this music? Describe some of the best songs.
- What do you see yourself doing after high school? Where will you be? Who will be there with you? What will you be doing 20 years

from now? How will you have changed? What will you have done to get to where you are?

Students put these questions and their responses into their idea source folder. Then throughout the year when they are freewriting they have a place to look for good material.

Judith Russell, Page Middle School, Franklin, Tennessee

A Peer Review Guide for Conciseness and Tone

This is an example of a peer review sheet I use in my "Communication and Report Writing" courses. It is designed for use in various courses in business writing or technical communication and can be adapted for other writing courses in which revision for style is taught.

When peer reviews and draft revisions are incorporated into the writing process, students improve their editing skills as well as their writing performance. Using the review sheet helps to keep students focused on the style of the writing rather than the subjective *like* or *dislike* reactions.

In this assignment, students bring to class (or develop during the class) a draft of a written assignment. For use within a single class, I'd recommend something short, perhaps a memo, a letter, or a brief report. Working in pairs, students then exchange papers and, using the review sheet, evaluate the paper they've received. After each pair completes the written review, they discuss what they've written and any suggested revisions.

This review sheet uses ranked statements to enforce structure and specificity upon those peer reviews. Students gain ability as editors at the same time they use the skills of the particular unit: in this case, they become increasingly aware of conciseness and tone as stylistic elements related to adjusting to specific audiences. Later, they can use the same sheet for self-assessment of their own drafts.

I've found use of this kind of review sheet most effective when students come to class with a completed rough draft of a given assignment in which the topics are either the same or related, so that each student's writing experience has some relevance to those of his or her peers. Any suggestions students receive from this exercise should be regarded as just that; the final decision remains the writer's. The review process may also raise questions that students want to discuss

with their instructors. For short pieces of writing, a single review and discussion can be done in 20–30 minutes, enabling students to actually begin their revisions and obtain instructor guidance during the same period.

The structured review sheet approach can be used in a variety of editing situations, of course, and with a range of assignments. If time permits, students can obtain reviews from several students; this variation enhances the value of the review by letting writers see that some suggestions are reinforced while others conflict and require further consideration by the writer. The key is to be sure that the evaluative statements are structured enough to point toward specific revision alternatives.

Review Sheet
Conciseness and Tone in Messages

Message written by: _____

Message reviewed by: _____

Reviewer: Indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements about this message:

4 = Strongly Agree 3 = Agree 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree

_____ 1. The message avoids obvious statements and material the reader already knows; it reveals awareness of the reader and that reader's relationship to the writer.

_____ 2. The style relies upon action verbs and active voice rather than "to be" forms and passive voice.

_____ 3. The style avoids expletive beginnings and useless introductory phrases.

_____ 4. The style avoids excessive use of prepositional phrases.

_____ 5. The style avoids wordy expressions, redundancies, and unnecessary repetition of ideas.

_____ 6. The level of diction is appropriate; the diction is businesslike, yet conversational.

_____ 7. The message uses positive language.

_____ 8. The writer maintains an appropriate tone and avoids complaining, insulting, lecturing, patronizing, or seeming argumentative.

_____ 9. The message maintains a "you-attitude" and emphasizes reader concerns and benefits.

_____ 10. The readability level is appropriate to the audience and situation. (Use the Fog Index at www.buffalostate.edu/~ronsmith/rdsfog.htm or a similar method to check.) If necessary, explain any items and suggest revisions below.

Gerald Siegel, York College of Pennsylvania, York, Pennsylvania

Sensory Exercises

Since sensory imagery is vital in writing good descriptions, I use several different exercises to aid my students in understanding and creating vivid images. The following exercise concentrates on smell imagery: the students associate particular smells with specific memories and write a poem to describe that memory.

I bring to class 10 items that have distinct smells, such as cinnamon, Vick's Vapor rub, soap, vanilla flavoring, an orange, and suntan lotion. I hide these in a paper sack so that students cannot see the items.

I pass out a worksheet on which students can record their guesses and their memories associated with each smell. Then I ask students to close their eyes. I walk around the room with the first item in a paper sack. The students smell the items, one by one. After all students have smelled the first item at close range, I tell them to open their eyes and record their responses while the smell is still fresh. After a minute or two for recording responses, I reveal the item so that students know what they have just smelled.

I emphasize that the responses of the students are all correct. Even if they were mistaken about what they thought they were smelling, this doesn't matter. The smell is simply supposed to help the student to recall a memory; therefore, the actual item being smelled is irrelevant.

I continue this same procedure with all 10 items.

At the end of class, I ask the students to use the most dominant memory that was evoked from the smells to compose an original poem or story, either in class or as homework.

Sandra Miller, Alan C. Pope High School, Marietta, Georgia

2 Literature

In this chapter you'll find activities intended to foster appreciation and understanding of literary works. Among the elements of these strategies are a dialectical journal; a list of questions to help students analyze characters; guest poets; a discussion of banned books; an examination of conflict between friends; and an in-depth poetry project for seniors.

Elements in a Character Analysis

Learning to analyze character is a important part of reading and writing fiction, not to mention its value to students in the decisions and choices they make outside the classroom. Here's a method I picked up years ago. I use it to help students examine and understand characters in their reading and develop believable characters in their own stories.

I tell my students that no two characters in fiction—and no two people in real life—are exactly alike. I distribute a list of questions such as those listed below (plus two notes on character development that students often find helpful), and explain that these categories and questions address some of the features that make characters/people distinct.

1. Appearance:

What does the character look like?
What kinds of clothes does the character wear?
What do these aspects of appearance reveal about the character?

2. Personality:

Does the character tend to be emotional or rational?
inward or outgoing? competent or incompetent? controlled or uncontrolled?
radical or conservative? caring or cold? a leader or a follower?
principled or unscrupulous?

3. Background:

Where did the character grow up?
What experiences has he or she had?
Is the character experienced or naive?
What is the character's social status? level of education? occupation?

4. Motivation:

What makes the character act as he or she does?
What are the character's likes and dislikes?
What are the character's wishes, goals, desires, dreams, and needs?

5. Relationships:

How is the character related to other characters in the narrative?
In what ways does he or she interact with these characters?
What are the consequences of these interactions?

6. Conflict:

Is the character involved in some conflict?
If so, is this an internal conflict—one that takes place within the character?
Is it an external conflict—a struggle between the character and some outside force?
Is the conflict ever resolved? If so, how?

7. Change:

Does the character change in the course of the narrative?
Does he or she learn or grow?
Is the character static or dynamic?

*Notes:*_____

Notes on Character Development

1. Characters are often revealed to readers in the following ways:
appearance
actions
speech/dialogue
thoughts
information stated by the character
information stated by another character about the first

2. Characters are sometimes developed through a dominant impression which is stated directly.

Examples: Susan is a lovable girl whom readers love immediately.
Joseph is an honest and trustworthy young man.
Silas is a smooth-talking, dangerous charlatan.

3. Characters can also be developed through a dominant impression which is stated indirectly.

Examples: His hair is long and stringy and badly in need of a serious washing. The scraggly beginnings of a beard are sprouting on his chin, which is smudged with old paint. A deposit of dirt seems permanently trapped under his ragged fingernails.

His intelligent eyes sparkle merrily, and his lips are usually turned upward in a pleasant smile. His well-formed, strong fingers hold the paint brush easily but with assurance.

After students examine and respond to some of these prompts, they are likely to come up with additional questions that can be added to the list.

Questions like these might be given to students to think about as they review a story or novel; might be written on poster paper for class discussion after a reading; or might be used as prewriting prompts when students begin to plan their own short stories.

Doris Chandler, Carmel High School, Indianapolis, Indiana

Dialectical Journal

The dialectical journal, a method I've adapted from various sources, is a double-entry note-taking process. It provides two columns which are in dialogue with one another, not only developing a method of critical reading but also encouraging habits of reflective questioning.

I give my students the guidelines below. I generally ask them to make 25 entries in their dialectical journals over the course of reading a novel.

> Draw a line down the middle of your notebook paper, thereby making two columns. The left column is used for traditional note forms of direct quotations and citations or summaries. The right column is used for commenting on the left-column notes. As you take notes, regularly re-read previous pages of notes and comments, drawing any new connections in a right-column summary before starting another page of note-taking/note-making.

Note-Taking	Note-Making
(Reading notes, direct quotes, observed notes, fragments, lists, images—often verbatim—always with page numbers)	(Notes about your left-column notes, summaries, formulations, revisions, editorial suggestions, comments about comments, comparisons, contrasts, inferences, judgements, and questions)
citation... (p. #)	Why would I include this? Why is this important?
citation... (p. #)	How does it change the meaning when I paraphrase like this?
quote from another page... (p. #)	I wonder why the protagonist did this? Is there any connection here to his previous actions? What is significant to me?

I explain to students why I think this style of notetaking is helpful to our reading. In the right-hand column, we "own" the new facts by putting them in our own words or by raising our own questions. By keeping a dialectical journal, we begin to think for ourselves about a text, and practice our thinking skills in general.

The practice of keeping dialectical journals contributes to lively and

informed classroom discussions of literature. Students have more to say and enjoy participating more when they have closely examined a text and their own response to it.

Bryan Ediger, J. N. Burnett Secondary, Richmond, British Columbia

A Poetry Invitational

I like to invite colleagues from my school to come to my room during their prep period and read their favorite published or original poetry. I encourage them to talk to my students about why the poem is special to them, and to answer any questions students might have. Students really enjoy hearing and seeing classroom teachers in a new light.

These occasional poetry readings encourage students to be more comfortable sharing poems, both original and from favorite poets. As ideas and feelings are shared, a real sense of community permeates the classroom. Students and teachers are encouraged to set the mood with props, costumes, lights, music, and so on. In lieu of applause, I ask students to show appreciation for the readings by snapping fingers.

As a response, students are encouraged to write their own poetry. We compile and display a classroom collection of both student and teacher poetry. The collections remain in the classroom so students throughout the years can enjoy them.

Minda Dennison Gill, Licking Heights High School, Summit Station, Ohio

Computer Practice via Poetry

This exercise is based on ideas originated by Darla Sanor. I use this assignment in my computer class to integrate students' poetry writing with creating a computer project. It gives them experience at reviewing their work and using word processing techniques.

I ask my students to create a poetry collection of at least five original poems centering on one theme. They are encouraged to write free verse, experiment with copy change, and create a concrete poem.

Students develop a title page, listing the title, their name, and the date they finish the project; a table of contents is also required and they may use bullets to list poems and include page numbers.

Students may use the following techniques/options in creating their collections:

- word art
- the tool palette and its draw options
- text boxes for copy change
- imported clip art from the Internet
- a variety of fonts and styles (chosen with purpose, not randomly)
- color
- spell check

Finished collections are printed and students turn in both their disks and their printed copies. The results can also be displayed in the classroom and discussed, so that students can benefit from seeing the variety of choices made by others.

Karen Campbell, Columbiana High School, Columbiana, Ohio

Antigone in Cyberspace

Like many of today's high school students, my students are fascinated with anything having to do with new technologies, computers, and cutting-edge multimedia. I often peruse *Newsweek* for the latest articles of "Cyberscope" and offer them as visual aids of the latest technologies entering the market. Students are always interested and ask many questions about modems, internet connections, e-mail, and so on. They also offer so much knowledge to the discussion that I learn some new things myself (which helps prepare me for the next group of freshmen!).

To make the most of students' interest, I developed some writing exercises that allow students to address issues in a work of literature and issues related to multimedia at the same time. I devised the examples here to supplement class study of *Antigone,* and while they aren't meant to take the place of discussion and writing on core issues, they serve as strong motivators in getting students writing and talking about characters and events. Similar assignments could be developed to complement many other plays, short stories, and novels.

As part of our study of *Antigone,* my students had already become acquainted with Greek theatre, and had discussed how primitive the settings and costume designs are compared to what they've seen in modern productions on stage and in film. Once students were finished

reading and discussing *Antigone,* I started a class discussion on a number of multimedia terms and concepts. I did this by showing a Power Point presentation that I made which outlined multimedia concepts, but listing terms on poster paper, the chalkboard, or a handout sheet would work too.

I included such terms as

cellular phones
voice mail
beepers
cyberspace
cybernetics
the Internet
e-mail and e-mail extensions
stand-alone computers
networks
electronic bulletin boards
video phones
videodisk players
interactive television
personal digital assistants

Students were able to define some of these terms; others I explained and we discussed. We talked about how stand-alone computers are being quickly replaced by more and more networking options. (I made a point of reminding students that, no matter how efficient technology becomes, it is still dependent upon one's ability to write, to speak clearly, to read, to listen, and to understand.)

Toward the end of the class period, students formed small groups and I distributed a handout entitled, "*Antigone* in Cyberspace," which we then reviewed as a class.

Antigone in Cyberspace

Directions: Each group is to select one of the four activities listed below for completion. Each group should have a Task Master (to keep the group organized), a Timekeeper, a Noise Monitor, a Spokesperson, and Scribes. (Remember to take turns being Scribes, so that one person does not have to write so much.)

Once your group has completed the activity, find a way to present it to the entire class. Poster board, markers, magazines, and an easel will be available for your convenience. Enjoy!

1. Create a headline news story and two or three related links based on a modern-day *Antigone* occurrence for a news site on the World Wide Web. To get an idea of length, format, and the kinds of links typically included in such stories, visit a news site such as one of the following on the Web:

   ABC News
   www.abcnews.go.com

   CBS News
   www.cbs.com

   NBC News
   www.nbcnews.com

   CNN News
   www.cnn.com

   The Chicago Tribune
   http://chicagotribune.com

   The Boston Globe
   http://www.boston.com/globe

   The Los Angeles Times
   http://www.latimes.com

   The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
   http://www.accessatlanta.com/ajc/

   The New York Times
   http://nytimes.com

   The Charlotte Observer
   http://charlotte.com/observer

   The Houston Chronicle
   http://www.chron.com

2. Rewrite a monologue from the play in modern-day format to include information from at least one form of interactive technology, such as an interactive television program or an Internet chat program.
3. Find a scene in *Antigone* which you believe would have been radically different given the existence of a certain piece of advanced high-tech equipment. Name the item and describe how and why the scene would have been different, and how it would have affected the outcome of the play.
4. Imagine that you find a computer disk next to the personal computer of Creon, Antigone, Haemon, or Eurydice. This disk contains personal documents—letters, "To Do" lists, data, and poems written by this character for his/her eyes alone. Decide on four or five documents, recreate them, invent file names for each, and create a (fake) printout of the disk directory showing all the filenames. Put all these together in a packet about the character.

My students worked diligently on these projects and were very creative in their responses to the assignments. The presentations and class discussion were lively, and gave students a chance to show their un-

derstanding of characterizations and plot. I even had students who finished early ask if they could tackle additional activities. My conclusion? That no matter the topic, it's worth making the most of students' interest in cyberspace!

Gaylynn A. Parker, Vancleave High School, Vancleave, Mississippi

The Great Book-Banning Debate

I recommend a strategy that I adapted from "*To Ban or Not to Ban: Confronting the Issue of Censorship in English Class*," an article by Marilyn Maxwell and Marlene Berman printed in the October 1997 issue of the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy.*

In this article, Maxwell and Berman describe a unique and interesting way that they deal with the issue of censorship. Each year, they pick a novel that is considered controversial for high school students and have their eleventh-grade students participate in a book-banning debate. The preparation for the debate and the debate itself take about four weeks of class time. Students are given three weeks to read the book at home. (Teachers can notify and/or involve parents according to their customary procedures.) Then they discuss the text and group into pro-banning and anti-banning "law firms" representing different groups in the school district. The students choose whether to defend or to prosecute the particular text. As the students work in groups to research and devise their arguments, teachers facilitate and advise students.

Other school personnel are also brought in to help with the project. For example, the librarian prepares a bibliography that may help the students, and the school psychologist participates in discussions of sensitive issues.

Group work is strongly encouraged in this exercise. Students are expected to present as a group and only receive group grades. The mock school board is compiled of various members of the high school community, and they also help to evaluate the students' work. The day after the trials, the students watch a video of the trial and critique themselves.

This is an interesting way to encourage students to actively engage in a text and to formulate thoughts and opinions that can be backed with researched information and materials. This also encourages stu-

dents to work cooperatively and to improve their public speaking skills.

Lora Hicks, Knoxville, Tennessee

Writing about a Conflict: A Preface to *Julius Caesar*

Teenagers may think that *Julius Caesar* has nothing to do with them and their lives, but this practice in narrative writing will help them realize that they have already experienced some of the same conflicts that are the motivational conflicts in *Julius Caesar*.

Student Directions

Think back to a time when you had a conflict with a friend or make your writing totally fictional. Use the plot that is given below. Decide what was the cause of the conflict that you will be writing about. Name your characters and describe what they are like. Show what happened between them by using first person from one of the character's points of view. Decide how the conflict was resolved. Show what the result of this resolution was on each of them and upon others.

Plot: Two friends struggle to maintain their friendship after one friend becomes more _____ (powerful, popular, successful, respected, etc.) than the other. The "lesser" friend has a very difficult time accepting the more _____ friend. You decide what should fill in the blanks and then tell the story of the conflict between the two friends and its resolution and effects.

Characters: Person A is something that Person B wants to be. They are quite equal in ability, but Person A has been recognized and rewarded for doing so well. Person B has contradictory feelings about his/her friend, who is doing better than he/she is. Be sure to include how each character is feeling.

Setting: You choose the time and place.

Resolution: Be sure you show how the conflict is resolved.

We move from these activities into discussion of the conflicts in *Julius Caesar,* and students' understanding of the play is enhanced by the connections they've made with their own experiences.

Margie A. Yeager, Connersville High School, Connersville, Indiana

Making *Julius Caesar* More Accessible

In collaboration with a special education teacher, I recently discovered a new way to teach *Julius Caesar* that made studying this work fun and more accessible for my students. By making *Julius Caesar* exciting to study, I caught my students' interest and they learned more than they ever had before.

Along the way we learned two important lessons in teaching *Julius Caesar*: 1) You have to get silly and let the kids get silly. The silliness lightens the load, making it bearable for even the weakest students. 2) You have to take it slow. By the time we finished, the students had ultimately experienced the play three or four times in three or four different ways. It took us ten weeks, but it was worth it.

Here are the strategies we used to get students motivated and to keep them going and one particular activity the students loved.

- We started out by showing the students the Kenneth Branagh version of *Much Ado About Nothing.* I made detailed summaries of each act, and we discussed them before viewing. We stopped often and discussed what was going on. This eased them into Shakespeare's language and was motivational because of its highly entertaining story and well-known actors.

- We started our study of *Julius Caesar* with an improvisation of each scene. Student volunteers received brief directions for an improvised skit illustrating some main point in what we were about to read, but in real-world terms. Example: Just before we read the first scene where Calpurnia tries to warn Caesar not to go to the capital, I called two students into the hall. I assigned one the part of a concerned parent, the other the part of a rebellious teen. I described a scenario in which the teen wants to go to a party, but the parent heard that it might get too rough. They were then told to spend about five minutes working on a skit that ended with the teen storming out of the house. The students loved these skits. Besides introducing the reading, it helped them make connections between the play and the real world.

- We shared a copy of the canine version of *Julius Caesar* from *Shakespeare Made Easy: An Illustrated Approach* by Muriel J. Mor-

ris, published by J. Weston Walch. This book uses cartoon dogs to illustrate various scenes from the play. The kids thought they were silly—another approach that helped make *Julius Caesar* non-threatening and fun.

We decided against using an easy-to-read version of *Julius Caesar* because we didn't want the kids to feel insulted. In the past, I had students read the play aloud and then watch the BBC video at the end. With many struggling readers in my class, I did not think reading the whole play aloud would be an option. Instead, we listened to a recording while we followed along in our books. We showed the video a piece at a time while we read. The kids said they understood more when we showed them a brief clip of a scene, then read that same scene. The video, they said, helped them to visualize what was happening as they read. This mixture of video, cassette recordings, and written text touched on most learning modalities. For those kinesthetic learners, we did something a little different. . . .

Making It Fun

At the end of each act, it was time for a celebration. We had a different "on your feet" activity for each act. A video camera recorded our activities, and even the shy students learned to ham it up for the camera. Here's a list of the various activities:

- Act One—Groups took a small portion of the act and rewrote it in their own language. It took about three days for them to script and rehearse their parts. This proved that they were understanding what we were reading, plus it gave them a chance to review the act.

- Act Two—Students created talk shows around various parts of Act Two. (Handout on back.) And yes, some of the talk shows got a little crazy (á la Jerry Springer), but they were insightful as well as highly entertaining.

- Act Three—Students presented newscasts covering the assassination from different parts of Rome. For this activity, we dressed in togas and went outside so students could find just the right spot for their news coverage. (I'm sure that a couple of parents are still unhappy about the ketchup stains on their good sheets!)

- Acts Four and Five—At this point, the students were feeling comfortable with the play. We watched the video of these last two acts, and then I divided the students into groups, assigning each group a part of the final acts. They then practiced and presented their part.

At the end of the ten weeks everyone was still having fun. I have many of the same students as juniors this year, and I'm amazed that they still talk about what a great time we had studying *Julius Caesar.*

Mary Abbitt Fye, Glasgow High School, Glasgow, Kentucky

American Literature Talk Show

A few years ago, I was searching for an essay topic that would stimulate my American literature students to think more critically about the characters and works we had studied. I decided to have my students write a script for an episode of the Ricki Lake talk show with the topic "I'm Gonna Be Me, No Matter What It Costs!" Here are the guidelines I distributed:

Topic

The struggle between the individual and society is a common theme in American literature. John Proctor (*The Crucible)*, Laurie Saunders *(The Wave)*, David Merrill (the film *Guilty by Suspicion*, and Henry David Thoreau are all characters who are strong individuals. (Certainly there are many other characters who could have been included and almost any theme could be applied to the talk show format.)

Assignment

Imagine that all four of these characters are appearing on the Ricki Lake show. The theme for the show is "I'm Gonna Be Me, No Matter What It Costs!"

Create a dialogue among all four of these individuals (and Ricki) in which they explain their own struggles with society. Be sure to have them comment on each others' struggles as well. (Ricki Lake is the person who knows all the information as you do; she can ask penetrating, and leading questions and can help the others compare their struggles.)

Issues to Consider

Explain each character's conflict with his or her society.
Explain how each character was treated by other members of his or her society.
Explain how each character feels about the success of his or her struggle (does he or she feel that he or she made a difference?).
Discuss who (among the group) made the biggest sacrifice or contribution.

The first time I assigned this topic, I was thrilled with the results. My students wrote pages and pages of lively and insightful dialogue including parenthetical notations indicating facial and other physical reactions. I also noticed that my students naturally incorporated effective transitions between characters and ideas; later we looked at the transitions in their scripts and talked about ways of improving the transitions in their essay writing. The greatest result was that my students wrote with wit and enthusiasm and demonstrated their understanding of an important theme in American literature.

Jill Pinard, John Stark Regional High School, Weare, New Hampshire

Senior Poetry Project

At my school, the first half of senior English is devoted to the study of poetry. The course concentrates on two related, semester-long projects: an oral explication of a self-selected, teacher-approved poem and the individual publication of a poetry anthology. Both projects culminate at the end of the semester, with scaffolding activities assigned throughout the semester.

Explication

To demonstrate that they know how to read a poem well, to construct a reasoned interpretation, and to support that interpretation through careful analysis of poetic elements, each student gives a 12- to 15-minute oral explication of one poem selected for close study.

Throughout the semester, students prepare for the explication through class study of poems and approaches to poetry as well as through independent reading and composition of analytical responses to self-selected poems.

The poem selected for explication must appear in the student's anthology and must be approved at least three weeks before explications begin, assuring adequate preparation time. Performances are scored by students and teacher according to the rubric shown below.

Comparison charts of averaged student scores and my scores are included with my evaluative letter to each individual. (Significant variations in rankings among students and the teacher are rare.) In addition, each performance is recorded so that the student can listen to his or her tape and compose a self-evaluation.

Scoring Rubric	Weak			Strong
1. Read poem with good diction/understanding	1	2	3	4
2. Offered brief, relevant remarks about author	1	2	3	4
3. Argued a thesis and offered specific, concrete, detailed, convincing evidence	2	4	6	8
4. Organized comments by logical method other than line-by-line paraphrase	2	4	6	8
5. Discussed imagery and other relevant poetic elements using correct vocabulary	2	4	6	8
6. Considered complexities and contradictions	2	4	6	8
7. Understood and correctly pronounced all words	1	2	3	4
8. Good eye contact and body language	1	2	3	4
9. Confident, clear delivery (good volume; no apologies; few "like's," "uhm's," "you know's")	1	2	3	4
10. Fielded questions with authority	2	4	6	8

Poetry Anthology

About a week after the explications, each student submits a personally selected, edited, and crafted anthology of poetry that is a genuine book (i.e., constructed according to a given form such as stab binding, case binding, or concertina folding, for instance).

The book must contain a minimum of twenty poems collected over the semester; an introductory essay of at least 750 words that prepares the reader for the collection; and a bibliography in correct MLA form that cites the sources of selected poems, biographical or critical information, and any illustrations used.

All other aspects of the anthology—its content, design, construction—are matters of individual choice. Each student is encouraged to discover an appropriate organizing principle (theme, subject, poetic

form, author, historical period, or the like) through composition of anthology status reports (due about every two weeks) and class discussion of ideas, plans, and problems, including book construction.

Classroom materials available for use include a collection of poetry books and multiple copies of *Cover to Cover: Creative Techniques for Making Beautiful Books, Journals & Albums* by Shereen LaPlantz and *Making Books by Hand: A Step-by-Step Guide* by Mary McCarthy and Philip Manna. Books are always displayed in the school, and some have been featured in a book exhibit at a local art gallery. In the future, books will be added to the school's anthology Web site.

In the course evaluation at the end of the year, almost every senior notes that the single most challenging and rewarding project undertaken in high school was this twin assignment. Many students have used their projects in college as examples of their work.

To see some examples of my students' work, visit the Web site at http://www.mcgehee.k12.la.us/AnthWeb/Anth.html.

Robley M. Hood, The Louise S. McGehee School, New Orleans, Louisiana

3 Explorations

Freeze frames, a reading quilt, and riddles that require research are just a few of the intriguing elements that make up the teaching strategies in this chapter. The ingenious activities presented here vary in focus, but they have several things in common: they inspire teachers; they motivate students; and they offer opportunities for genuine learning in the classroom.

Freezing a Character

I am indebted to my colleague Nancy Brennan, New Hampshire Teacher of the Year for 1998, for bringing many wonderful theater activities into my classroom.

When my students are trying to learn more about a character in a piece of literature, we often create "freeze frames" as a way to discover the character. Students love to get up on their feet and into a scene. I have used this technique both as a review and as a guide during our reading of short stories and novels. This activity is easily adaptable to fit most curriculums.

The teacher selects key scenes from the novel or short story; or if the activity is used as a review, the class can brainstorm to select the four to six scenes which they consider to be the most important. Then a group of students chooses a scene to work on.

First, the group creates a simple sketch of their scene onto a large sheet of paper. The groups are encouraged to consider the minor characters in the scene as well as the major characters. This step often evokes discussion and review of the text as students try to get down on paper the placement of the characters within the setting. When finished, the groups gather to share their sketches. Members of each group explain their sketch to the rest of the class.

The next step is for each group to "become their sketch." The mem-

bers of the group will become the characters in the picture and will create a freeze frame of this scene by moving into position and then freezing. Since no props are allowed, students must creatively discover ways to reflect conflicts, motivations, emotions, and dilemmas. They are encouraged to consider body position, gestures, facial expression, and eye contact as they assume the pose of one of the characters in the scene.

If there are more students in the group than there are characters in the scene, the extra students can be observers to the scene who may reflect or emphasize what is happening in the scene. I have found that even my most reserved students are willing to participate in these freeze frames since, after first working with the sketch, they are fairly comfortable with the scene. Furthermore, there are no lines to speak. They just have to freeze in position.

Finally, each group presents its freeze frame to the rest of the class. While the group is "frozen" into the scene, the rest of the class discusses what is going on in the scene. Often classmates will offer suggestions on how to modify the freeze frame to make it more effective. They might suggest that one of the actors should look down upon another actor to reflect the first character's feeling of superiority over the second character. They might show a minor character reaching out to another character in a gesture of support. The ensuing discussion serves as an excellent vehicle for analysis of the characters within literature.

Carol B. Brown, John Stark Regional High School, Weare, New Hampshire

A Reading Quilt

This exercise could be used with any fiction or nonfiction prose to get students thinking about their reading as a whole picture and not just random events.

In this example I use *The House on Mango Street*—which inspired the idea with its format—but any piece with good use of characterization will work.

I give students copies of the handout shown on page 35 to help them plan the images for their quilt.

Student Handout

The author of *The House on Mango Street* writes her book in a series of "vignettes" or "cuentitos, like little squares of a patchwork quilt." This format gives the reader a unique picture or "quilt" of the character's life. Your assignment is to create a collage-style quilt that notes the thoughts and events relating to the main character, Esperanza.

You will need between ten and fifteen images on your quilt. You may take your images from the literal or figurative pictures that the author develops. You must have the title of the book in the quilt and also something that represents the author. You may use fabric, construction paper, felt, or poster board. The size is up to you. You may create original artwork or use pictures from magazines, and you may make the final work look like a crazy quilt or use a more regular pattern.

The House on Mango Street

List some of the descriptive pictures in the book. Remember that imagery is the use of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Write the quote and the page number. You will need a minimum of ten—try for fifteen!

	PAGE	IMAGE	EXPLANATION
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			

I evaluate students on creativity, neatness, and on the insights into the character displayed by their images. The final projects, displayed on the walls, are a wonderful addition to our classroom.

Kathryn Wiley, Blue Springs High School, Blue Springs, Missouri

Student-Led Discussions

"One of the best ways to learn something is to have to teach it."

This quote from a friend of mine has always stuck with me. One of the best ways I know to get students interested in a novel is to directly involve them in the teaching process at least once during the reading. I use this activity with *Great Expectations,* and each team of students leads discussion once during the four-week span of reading.

Guidelines for Student Discussion Leaders

Two students will team up to lead one 20- to 25-minute class discussion. You will receive a quiz grade worth up to ten points. I suggest that you divide the work equally. In most cases you will be asking questions of your classmates. These questions fall into the following categories:

1) **Basic comprehension questions:** mostly *who, what, where,* and *when* type of questions about characters and plot to make sure students have read and understood the material.
2) **Inference and synthesis questions:** mostly *how* and *why* questions about actions and characters that aren't so obvious. The answers have a definite basis in the text, but students have to make connections with other parts they have read.
3) **Prediction questions:** questions that ask the students to make educated guesses about what will happen to a particular character or how a conflict will be resolved or how the book will end. Those who have read ahead should not comment.
4) **Personal opinion/experience questions:** questions that ask students to state their opinions about characters, issues, themes, and the quality of writing in the novel. This is also a good place to ask students if they have had any experiences or relationships which connect to something in the book. You, the discussion leaders, might want to start this off with your own opinions or experiences.

5) **Clarification questions:** ask your classmates if there are any points of confusion in the reading. You are the "experts" on this day and should attempt to answer the questions.
6) **Key passages:** point out significant and/or difficult passages and either comment on the meaning yourselves or ask your classmates to do so.

Some basic advice about creating questions and teaching: a) Try to create questions that fit into each of the six categories. That gives variety. b) Call on as many students as possible during the class. Don't always call on the people who have their hands up. Call on people who *don't* have their hands up, especially if they have not participated in class. c) Read the passage you are to teach twice. You should know it quite well because you are the teaching authority for that brief period of time on that one day. d) Communicate with your partner starting at least a couple of days in advance. Develop a good plan of action. Divide and conquer the development of discussion questions. I expect you and your partner to be well prepared and involved in a coordinated effort. e) Don't be afraid to be creative with group sizes and activities. The question categories listed above should not limit what you do. The idea here is to fully engage the entire class in discussing the book. I want to receive a copy of your questions/activities after the presentation.

Here are examples of some of the questions and notes my students have used with *Great Expectations.* I usually give them a couple of examples of questions in each category and then encourage them to come up with their own lists of questions.

Questions for Great Expectations *(Chapters 1–3)*

1. How did the narrator acquire the name "Pip"?
2. What became of Pip's parents and brothers?
3. What did Pip call the area of the countryside where he lived? Describe it.
4. Whom did Pip encounter in the graveyard? What did he look like? How did he treat Pip?
5. What did the prisoner want from Pip? How did Pip react to this man?
6. What was the prisoner's primary threat? Who would carry it out?
7. As he watched the prisoner walking away from the graveyard, what did Pip imagine was happening?
8. In what manner did Pip go home?

Inference/Synthesis Questions

1. How would you describe Pip's sense of imagination?
2. What does the narrator's language level indicate about the narrator?
3. What does the language level of the prisoner indicate about him?
4. Even without knowing the definition of the first words on your vocabulary list, what do you think those words mean, based upon the context of the sentences in which they appear? (You may underline.)
5. Based upon the description that Pip gives us, what is your impression of life in the marshes?
6. How does Dickens attempt to draw us into the story? Which emotions is he trying to evoke?
7. How does he supply background information about Pip's life?
8. How old do you think Pip is? How old do you think his sister is?

Prediction/Speculation Questions

1. Why do you think Pip visited the churchyard in the first place?
2. What do you think Pip will do when he gets home?
3. What sort of life do you think Pip has at home?
4. Do you think there will be any further contact between Pip and the prisoner? Why or why not?
5. What repercussions, if any, will there be for Pip for stealing the file and the food?
6. Dickens mentions the mist several times. What do you think it could signify? (23, 27)

Personal Opinion/Experience Questions

1. Has a stranger ever approached you and threatened you in order to get something from you? How did you react?
2. How would you have reacted in Pip's situation? Would you get the food for the prisoner?
3. Have you ever had to deal with a heavy-duty authority figure like Mrs. Joe? How did you handle the situation? How do you think Pip handled it?
4. Did you find any parts of these chapters to be humorous? If yes, which parts?
5. Did you find any parts that had a sense of pathos (character in an unfortunate situation who arouses pity and compassion)?

Clarification

1. What parts of the first chapters caused you any difficulty? Language? Plot? Characters? Setting?
2. Do you have questions about anything that has happened so far?

Key Passages

9B "The shape of the letters...state of existence." Shows the beauty and complexity of Dickens's language.

10B "A fearful man...by the chin." Shows Dickens's ability to describe a character vividly.

12B "You bring me...you say?" Artful use of dialogue to develop a character.

14A "My sister...weakness." The use of humor in descriptions. **15C** I took...great leg." **17C** "Joe was...."

19B "Conscience is a dreadful thing...ever did?" Thoughts and feelings of the narrator.

21B "Since that time...." Reveals that Pip is telling this story in retrospect.

James Brooks, Chamindade-Julienne High School, Dayton, Ohio

Gift Books for First Graders

In this project, older students interview younger students and create books about the younger children, which they present as wrapped gifts at holiday time or another special occasion.

I used this project with sixth graders. I first taught students the elements of interviewing. We discussed such elements as brainstorming and selecting questions ahead of time, helping the interviewee to feel comfortable, asking effective follow-up questions, taking clear notes, and drafting and polishing the results.

Then I asked them to come up with 10 questions to ask a first grader. I matched each sixth grader with a first grader and we visited the first-grade classroom for our interviews. Students brought the answers back and made a simple book with captions and illustrations from the information they obtained in the interview. The students wrote in first person from the point of view of the first graders.

The first page usually introduced the child and the following pages told about the child's family, pets, favorite food, games, or whatever information the sixth grader gleaned from his or her interview.

When they were all finished, we shared the works with our class. We then wrapped them in homemade wrapping paper and delivered our gifts to the first graders the day before our holiday break. The first graders loved receiving a book about themselves and the sixth graders enjoyed the praise and response they got from their hard work.

Amy Mozombite, Toledo Christian Schools, Toledo, Ohio

Research through Riddles

Here's a light research assignment that my students always enjoy. It's not original with me—I think it's been kicking around for years, but it's always a success. In conjunction with this assignment, I cover simple guidelines for typing a bibliography and creating a cover page with student name and date.

Student Handout

1. Choose a famous person to research. This person may be a famous author, historical figure, political figure, scientist, entertainer, etc., but don't choose anyone who is prominent in the news right now.

2. Find three sources in the media center or library that have information on the background of the chosen person. Only one of your sources may be an encyclopedia. You may use the *Reader's Guide* to find magazines, the vertical file, the card catalog, biographies.

3. After reading the source material and taking notes, compose a riddle of at least 12 lines about this person. Use clues within the lines. The following is a student example:

   I am an English Novelist.
   I worked in a shoe blocking shop.
   I was born very poor.
   My family and I lived in a prison for several years, but I had "great expectations" in life.
   I became famous at 24 years of age.
   I wrote a book that had a good "twist" to it.
   It frightened many of my readers at first.
   I always dreamed of working in a "copperfield" with a friend named David.
   I heard many tales in the twin cities about which I wrote later on.
   I wrote 15 major novels.
   I died on June 9, 1870.
   My real name is John Huffam.
   Who am I?

4. Document your facts by using parenthesis to give credit to your sources. For example, one note of documentation for the above riddle reads as follows:

   I died on June 9, 1870. (Adams, pg. 408)

5. Type two copies of your riddle (put the answer on the back of the page).

6. Type a bibliography (we'll cover this in class).

7. Type a cover page (we'll cover this in class).

8. You will be graded on your creativity, on following directions, and on following the format described. See how creative and clever you can be!

Christine Christensen, Brighton High School, Brighton, Michigan

E-mail Initiation

When I found out all eighth-grade students taking computer literacy at our junior high would be opening e-mail accounts with Hotmail, I decided it would provide the perfect opportunity for me to assign some activities that would help them feel comfortable with e-mail and the Internet.

I set up mass e-mail groups including all of my students. This simplified the number of messages I had to send each day and assured me that all students in the class who had signed up for the e-mail activities received assignments at the same time.

I sent students an introductory letter, explaining about the e-mail assignments, offering two points extra credit for each e-mail I received, and asking them to join in the fun.

Students were free to choose one or more assignments to pursue. The following are some of their favorites.

1. *Character postcards*
   Go to the following site and create a postcard from the point of view of one of the characters in the stories we have read so far this year.

http://www.kodak.com/digitalImaging/pictureThis/picThisHome.jhtml

What backgrounds, pictures, etc. would that character choose? What message would that character send?

When you have finished designing the character's postcard, send it to me at my e-mail address.

2. *Poetry Contest*
   Enter one of the original poems you've written in class in this contest. Be sure to read their entry rules before you submit.

   http://www.bluemountain.com/esub/ccontest1/

   E-mail me a copy of the rules, the poem you submit, and the response you receive that shows they received your poem.

3. *Vocabulary Puzzles*
   Go to the following site for directions on how to make a puzzle from your vocabulary words. You may choose the type of puzzle you make.

   http://www.puzzlemaker.com

   Once you have completed the puzzle, print two copies of it. One will be your original, and the other will be your key. Use a highlighter to mark the answers on it. Then send me an e-mail message, telling me about your puzzle.

Jana J. Turbyfill, Mount Pleasant Junior High, Mount Pleasant, Texas

Personality Poster Project

The personality poster project is a two-day in-class assignment I make the first week of school to help students learn about each other. The materials needed are scissors, glue, plain 8 1/2" x 11" paper, and magazines.

Students cut pictures or words from magazines that reflect their personality and interests. They may do their own artwork or use a computer instead of cutting pictures from magazines. They are encouraged to have at least eight items on the poster; however, they may use as many more as they like. One of the items must be a quote that has significance to them. I show posters made by former students to demon-

strate the variety of creative items they may use. In past projects, students have used their names, astrological signs, ages, extra-curricular activities, hobbies, causes, collections, favorite musicians, movies, actors, books, restaurants, foods, songs, cars, and clothes.

After I have shown examples, I write the rubric on the board that I will use as assessment. Half the grade is for the creativity of the poster, and half the grade is for the explanation of their poster.

After students have completed their posters, they take one to two minutes to present them to the class. They select certain items from their posters and tell why they put these items on their posters.

For the first few weeks of school, I display all the posters on my bulletin boards. The project gets students talking about themselves and gives their classmates a better sense of who they are.

Ann M. Little, Alcorn Central High School, Glen, Mississippi

Read-Around Groups

Read-Around Groups can be used to provide students with an opportunity to examine peer writing, evaluate written work, and identify quality writing. Students also develop interpersonal and communication skills as they collaborate to decide on the merit of each piece of writing. I adapted this from a workshop provided by Kathleen Huie of Fort Pierce, Florida.

When I use this strategy, I use the steps below. I preface the activity with a request that all students observe an atmosphere of respect as we read each others' work.

1. Organize students into equal groups consisting of four per group. (Groups with more than four students may be difficult to manage, and groups with less than four may not allow for enough feedback.)

2. After students have completed a given writing assignment, they place a code of their choice in the lower right-hand corner of the paper. (No name should be used.)

3. Select a group leader for each group to collect papers in each set and pass them on to the next group. Select a group recorder in each group to list the best papers by code numbers.

4. Each student in the group passes his/her paper to the student on the

left and reads the paper quickly and silently. Then students pass the papers to the person on the left. When everyone at the table has read each paper, the students quietly discuss which one they liked best and why. The recorder lists the number of the "best" paper.

5. Group leaders collect papers from their own groups and pass the set to the next group on the right. Repeat the procedure above until all papers have been read by each group. (You will need to keep track of the number of times papers are passed from table to table so that you know when everyone in the room has read each paper.)

This activity can lead to valuable discussion about strength and weaknesses in writing, common errors, and matters of writing style. Even though we use codes instead of names, I usually use a "test run" first in which students read and evaluate a few papers from a previous class (with names removed). This allows students to get used to the process and to practice giving feedback respectfully.

Penny Beers, School District of Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach, Florida

Talking about Tragedy

Some type of tragedy or disaster touches us all at some point in our lives. As we are faced with other's misfortune, we are likely to feel compassion and pity. Simultaneously, we may experience fear because we are reminded of our own vulnerabilities.

These exercises will encourage students to consider how we deal with tragedy, and question just how much control we have in a given situation, and what our personal responsibility is in the face of disaster. These and other questions will be analyzed in order to help students appraise tragic situations, offer opinions, and make informed value judgments which can possibly effect change.

Exercise 1

Write for five minutes on what you consider a disaster to be. What are some components of a disaster? How does the number of people affected relate to the way we define disaster? Name disasters that affected large numbers of people. Why are we attracted to them? Have you seen any of the disaster movies? Name at least one

event in the past and one in the present that you would consider to be a disaster. Share the events that you named with class members. What do these events have in common? How do they differ? Write down as many characteristics as you can.

Exercise 2

Each of you will receive a packet of readings. These readings express tragedy from individual perspectives. The narrative form of these pieces clearly expresses what people have endured and survived.

Read the first-person narrative poem "Fifty Years Later" by Judy Weissenberg Cohen, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Germany (this poem is currently posted at http://remember.org/educate/judypoem.html); also the short story *The Supper,* available in *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (Penguin, 1976), by Tadeusz Borowski, who spent two years in Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps; and *Dulce Et Decorum Est,* a poem by Wilfred Owen, a poet and soldier who was killed a week before the war ended, available in *The Complete Poems and Fragments* (Norton, 1984). (Two related Owen sites available at the time of this writing are http://www.rjgeib.com/heroes/owen/owen.html and http://bewoner.dma.be/eridaer/cultural/owen.html).

Get into groups and discuss the following questions:
After reading Cohen's poem discuss why you think she writes it? What makes it so compelling?
In Borowski's story, what is the significance of the title?
What is the irony in Owen's poem?
What do these readings show us about the human condition and the human spirit?

Exercise 3

View excerpts from the movie *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance,* directed by Francis Ford Coppola. (Ko-yaa-nis-katsi—from the Hopi language meaning crazy life; life in turmoil; life disintegration; life out of balance; a state of life that calls for another way of living). Discuss the movie and name ways in which we have affected nature or tried to change it. Examples: *Re-routed water ways, dams, cut down trees.*

Exercise 4

Class will begin by discussing disasters in terms of two kinds: a disaster that no one can be held responsible for and those where someone is to blame. Discussion questions will center around which kinds of disaster do we tend to be more "attracted" to and interested in. How can you connect novels, movies, plays, or poetry to disaster? Why do you think our culture is so attracted to disaster as reflected in the abundance of current disaster movies?

Read the biblical story of the flood. We will connect this story to other stories in history and consider why stories endure time. What do they give us? All cultures have stories. Why are stories so important? Where do myths fit in?

These exercises get students exploring issues involved in disaster or tragedy and how such issues affect people differently. Discussions and writing assignments about these issues can help reveal the breadth and depth of the human spirit in the face of failure, defeat, and death.

Anne Smith, Father Gabriel Richard High School, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Hot off the Press

Here is an activity that helps my students strengthen communication skills, use the five W's—who, what, where, when, why—to write a press release, develop imagination, and proofread and edit for language conventions and style.

As a class, develop a list of careers that interest students. Next, each student should list three accomplishments for which he/she wishes to be remembered in their career choice. Because I want creativity and cleverness, I share some of my "wild and crazy dreams"—for example, to be the guest pianist with the local symphony; and to do a twelve-week book tour promoting my latest book. While some students were very reserved in their responses, others immediately developed ingenious successes for their futures.

As prewriting, we review the five W's of news writing and I show samples of press releases from the local newspaper. As an example, I model a press release for myself featuring one of my "wild and crazy dreams."

Next, students draft a press release about their return to town as a stunning success at the career they chose. I have a transparency of my press release available for students who may benefit by reviewing a model.

To revise their press releases students may work with a partner or in small groups to revise for clarity and content. Additional revision suggestions may be made by the teacher to achieve news writing style. Students may also need help revising their headlines.

I remind students to edit for language conventions (e.g., subject-verb agreement, pronoun reference, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling) and for stylistic elements. This may also be done with a partner, a small group, or the teacher.

Credit is given for using the writing process, and a grade based on creativity, the students' use of the five W's, and correct use of grammar is assigned to the completed activity.

Anne P. Anderson, Caddo Middle Magnet School, Shreveport, Louisiana

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